STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

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*100th Issue*

# Jesuits Praying:
# Personal Reflections by Past and Present Seminar Members

21/5 NOVEMBER 1989

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## THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

A group of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

The Seminar studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation to religious institutes to recapture the original inspiration of their founders and to adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material which it publishes.

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of the Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, laity, men and/or women. Hence the Studies, while meant especially for American Jesuits, are not exclusively for them. Others who may find them helpful are cordially welcome to read them.

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# 100th Issue

JESUITS PRAYING:

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

BY

PAST AND PRESENT SEMINAR MEMBERS

Studies
in the Spirituality of Jesuits
21/5
November 1989

**For Your Information . . .**

A celebration of the 100th issue of *Studies* would not be complete without remembering the man who was responsible for *Studies* from its first through its eighty-fifth numbers. In 1969 Father George Ganss undertook the founding and direction of *Studies* at the request of the then Fathers Provincial of the ten provinces of the Society of Jesus in the United States. The Provincials came up with the idea, the hope, for a recurrent gathering of a group of diverse American Jesuits who, out of their differing experiences, would discuss matters relevant to the spiritual life of American Jesuits and who would in some way make the results of their discussions available to the Society in the United States. To George Ganss they gave the responsibility for putting flesh on those bare bones of an idea. The Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality of which he was chairman, and *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, of which he was editor, are the testimony to how well he succeeded in fulfilling that responsibility. The Seminar has now met regularly for more than twenty years. Some sixty American Jesuits from all ten provinces have been members of it. The results of its activities are evident in the issues of *Studies* which now go not only to all American Jesuits individually but to subscribers, both institutional and individual, in every English speaking country of the world as well as to lands of most other modern languages. I am sure that I express the sentiments of all who in any way share in *Studies* when I here say to Father Ganss, "Thank you, George, for so great and lasting a contribution to our Jesuit lives!"

In another land, at Chantilly in France, Fr. Ganss and I recently participated in an international colloquium on the history and spirituality of the Society of Jesus. In the Jesuit vow formula there is a phrase "understanding all things in accord with the Constitutions of this same Society." At the beginning of October some seventy-five Jesuits invited from around the world gathered for a meeting on just how the Society has understood its Constitutions over the past four hundred and fifty years. To detail the riches

of the conference and especially of the informal encounters might take a whole issue of *Studies*. But surely to be mentioned was the well-nigh universal impression that increasingly, as the Constitutions are read, studied and prayed over, they become a liberating document, indeed structuring the Society but also freeing the energy and zeal of its members to respond both corporately and individually to serve the needs of the Church and to respond to the love of the Lord.

Lastly, you will see some changes in the look of *Studies* in January, 1990 as it begins a new year which is also the beginning of the two years, 1990-1991, in which we commemorate the 450th anniversary of the foundation of the Society (1540) and the 500th (1491) of the birth of Saint Ignatius.

**John W. Padberg, S.J.**
**Editor**

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# JESUITS PRAYING: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS BY PAST AND PRESENT SEMINAR MEMBERS

## INTRODUCTION

*John W. Padberg, S.J.*

"At the heart of Jesuit life is prayer." In the first issue (January 1989) of this present volume of *Studies*, that remark formed part of the announcement that "the one-hundredth consecutive issue of *Studies* will be published in this present year . . . " and "that the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality has plans to mark the occasion in a special way."

This is that one-hundredth issue of *Studies*. Its topic is prayer. Its authors are past and present members of the Seminar. Last summer all such members received a letter inviting them to help celebrate the 100th issue of *Studies*. The letter asked them to participate in making that issue special by writing a brief statement from their own experience as a "pray-er." To inform you of what we were seeking, let me quote from that letter:

> [This statement] need not detail your extraordinary graces or blinding lights or black holes (although it may do that if you so choose). What we ask is simply a brief personal reflection in reference to one or several questions *such as* the following:
>
> What way of prayer do I find best for myself?
>
> What helps me in most in prayer?

What do I want, what do I hope for, from prayer?
What do I personally think prayer is?
What would I tell a young Jesuit, an older Jesuit, about prayer?

Thirty-three of the Seminar members were able to respond. The variety of their works and of their places of residence is evident from the list of contributors that follows their reflections. They range in age from thirty-nine to eighty-four, and they have been in the Society of Jesus from twenty-one to sixty-five years. Their personal reflections make up this issue of *Studies*.

Some readers will remember that when this special issue was announced, a feature of it was to be a selection of "classic Jesuit prayers." Our readers were invited to contribute examples of such prayers. They responded generously, so generously, in fact, that this single issue of *Studies* could not contain both the personal reflections of Jesuits on praying in the present and the classic Jesuit prayers from the past. We hope to publish that selection sometime in the future, when the work of verifying texts and authors, editing, and, in some cases, translating has been done. In the meantime, our readers surely have our gratitude for their response to that request for such prayers.

The reflections which follow make clear that indeed for these members of the Society in the United States today, engaged in such a range of apostolates, taken up with so much activity, "at the heart of Jesuit life is prayer."

## Stories We Imagine Ourselves Living

*J. A. Appleyard, S.J.*

Don Quixote, Ignatius of Loyola, and Emma Bovary have one thing in common: their lives did not make sense to them until they began to imagine themselves as the central characters of romantic stories. René Girard calls this "triangular desire": an image mediates between the desiring subject and the object of passion (honor? recognition? love?) so strongly that the image seems to be the model for the kind of life which will achieve the desired object. Prayer seems to be always more or less "triangular" like this, an expression of desire modeled by stories we imagine ourselves living out. If our relationship to God is imagined in terms of stories, then our prayer will change as our stories develop.

Where do these stories come from? From nursery rhymes and games, from bedtime tales and prayers we're taught and explanations we're given, from books our parents read to us, from family anecdotes and sermons and Bible history, from comic strips and TV and movies, from history and biography and art as we get older.

But which stories? I think there are four basic ones, which we learn one by one as we grow up and which eventually form one story if we have lived long enough and wisely. You may recognize the influence of Northrop Frye here. The simplest story, the one we learn first, is *romance*. Like Dorothy in Oz or the Hardy boys, the heroes and heroines of romance live in an ideal world where evil is always defeated, where adventures end happily and wishes come true. But we outgrow this story as adolescents and want the realism of stories which acknowledge that bad things can happen to good people. In the realm of *tragedy*, where fate or flaw can mean that noble characters suffer catastrophe and death, we make room for evil, not just threatening us from outside, but now mixed up in our very natures. But eventually the grandeur of tragic suffering seems too much to claim for ourselves. The adult story is *irony*, the mordant

double vision of middle age which fixes on the permanent discrepancy between what we would like and what is. Irony is a parody of romance, Frye cleverly observes: its central character is no hero with a transcendent destiny, but someone all too subject to human ills, whose quests are aimless or wrongheaded and end in failure. Marvelously, though, there is one more story to be learned, *comedy*, which typically begins with blocked relationships and ends with the reconciliation and reintegration of its characters into a new community, symbolized by a feast, a dance, or a marriage. The comic vision celebrates the power of imagination both to embrace the limitations and follies of the world of experience and to assert faith in the possibility of their being transcended and renewed.

As I said, if our relationship to God is imagined in terms of stories, then our prayer will change as our stories develop. Greathearted idealism, the adventure of doing great deeds for an awesome but generous God, may later yield to introspective brooding which goes back and forth across the gap between potential and failure, between the mysterious attractiveness of God and the temptation to assure our own worth by the purity of our resolves. This may then turn into self-consciousness about our faith, into ambiguity about the meaning of our lives, about the sincerity of our intentions, about whether God is even listening to us or cares. Finally, though, if we are blessed, we may discover that we can "find God in all things," be "surprised by joy," stand outside ourselves and see the world from the single perspective from which God sees it, integrated and whole.

We seem to move from one of these stories to another as we mature, but I suspect that as adults we switch back and forth among them all as we need to. We probably have to live a long time and acquire a considerable measure of spiritual freedom before we can convince ourselves that the comic vision is really the plot of our lives. But desire for the whole reality of the ending pushes us on through these stories. At least this is how prayer makes sense to me right now.

## My Proverbs on Praying

*Gregory I. Carlson, S.J.*

Proverbs can be maddening. Like good metaphors, they suggest. But like good metaphors, they seldom fit with each other, and they never cover the whole field. They end up contradicting each other, so that we have to be savvy enough to know when one proverb fits and when another.

As I have tried to answer the invitation from the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality and to offer something personal from my experience of prayer, I have been surprised to find myself turning to something very like proverbs, bits and pieces of operational advice that have helped me. As is often the case with proverbs, I do not know where I first heard most of these or how much I have reshaped them since then. I hope they might suggest something to our readers if they are left in something like proverbial form.

• Praying, from my youngest years on, has gone through four phases. First I talked at God. Then I talked to God. Then I listened to God. Now I listen for God. Who knows what comes next!

• Some of my best prayer has occurred when I thought I was daydreaming.

• The normal matter of Ignatius's prayer consisted of the issues and experiences he was facing at the time, especially in his ministry.

• Prayer is as much physical gesture as it is anything else, like the physical presence of two friends with one another.

• I do not know how it works, but a day that includes some quiet prayer has a different tone from the day that does not. The day has more of an anchor. I can get at the important things and face the difficult things.

• One good test of a liturgy for its presider is: Does he pray during it?

• If experience is the language in which God reveals Himself,

prayer is the time we take just to listen.

• The first and last purpose of prayer is to be with God. Any "purposes" that get in the way of that purpose are distractions.

• Our times demand Jesuits who change and grow. From my dealings with Jesuits, I would guess that the one factor most closely associated with whether a Jesuit grows and changes is *whether he prays*—not whether he is prayerful but whether he makes time to pray.

• What we want touches the most sacred place in us. If prayer helps to reveal what we want, the prayer is doing wonderful things.

• Achievement-oriented Jesuits find prayer hard, and that description includes many Jesuits. Praying involves wasting time. Like other experiences that do not aim at productivity—old age, sickness, community, and friendship—prayer engages the underdeveloped side of many Jesuits.

• I have prayed most regularly when I was in need and when I was afraid.

• As I look over thirty years of Jesuit life with all its ups and downs, I am surprised and grateful that I have never stopped praying. Many other facets of life have ebbed and flowed; some have simply died. Praying—however irregular, confused, and scattered—has never simply stopped.

• Why do I pray? I pray because of the hope summed up in a one-liner from the opening prayer of the Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time: "May Your love make us what You call us to be."

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## How Do I Pray?

*L. Patrick Carroll, S.J.*

Despite having acted as spiritual director for more than twenty years, I have yet to hear someone tell me he or she is a "great prayer." Constantly I hear from others what echoes in myself: "I don't pray enough," or "I don't pray well," or "I am not disciplined or faithful enough." I find myself anything but an exception to the human tendency to denigrate one's prayer.

Still, I do pray.

I am most consciously praying in preparation to preach, or teach, or celebrate. I try to take the Scripture given, run it through my heart, my guts, not just my head, so that what I say rings true, rings honest, at least to myself. And God seems to grace me regularly in this endeavor.

I love to preach, perhaps mostly because it is the way I best discover how God prays in me.

I am writing these reflections while on retreat, overlooking the Pacific Ocean, across the Nestucca River, inundated by the beauty of nature. Despite surroundings that would seem to conjure up God's presence to a stone, when I try to pray "only for myself," I am blank, empty, distracted. God seems a distant former thought, now flown. I feel hypocritical. How can I speak of a Jesus I do not know personally, privately, in the quiet of my heart alone?

I can, and do, and must remember moments of grace spread like waves all through the banks and brakes of my life. The God I know, love, proclaim, trust in, arrives when I am not looking, touches me when my back is turned. This God comes

in my tears at the anniversary Mass of a couple who mirror God's fidelity,

in the arms of a friend who loves me despite my faults,

in the courage and laughter of a brother Jesuit who borrows my collar to get arrested,

in the daily knock on my office window of a mildly mentally ill woman who waves and calls me "sweetie,"

in the almost constant presence of Galan, an autistic young man, outside my door asking for a smoke.

My prayer, then, lies in remembering those moments, in (as Ignatius might say) examining my consciousness to discover the One who has been and is present.

For me to be faithful to prayer is rather to be faithful to my life, to never let it become "just one damn thing after another," but to savor its richness, feel its pain, acknowledge its tedium, celebrate its love. Prayer is most aptly described as "letting God love me." God does. My task is to notice, to remember, and to stake my life on those memories.

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## Prayer of Gratitude

*Thomas H. Clancy, S.J.*

If someone woke you up in the middle of the night and asked, "What do you say?" you would probably mumble "Thank you" and go back to sleep. That is the answer you learned in childhood. You were visiting an aunt and she offered you a cookie. You reached eagerly for it; but, before you could stuff it into your mouth, your mother intervened. "What do you say?" she asked. If you were a dutiful child, you muttered a quick "Thank you" and then ate the cookie.

When I entered the Society and learned that I was to devote an hour every day to "mental prayer," I wondered, What will I say? Of course, that is not the right first question. That would have been

"What will God say?" But if prayer is done "by speaking exactly as one friend speaks to another" (*SpEx*, [54]), one has to say something from time to time. For me the best thing to say is "Thank you."

That is the pattern one finds in the psalms and other prayers in the Old and New Testament. Most of the prayers in the missal follow the same format: "O God, who . . ." Then the Church calls to mind some benefit we have received. Only after giving thanks and praise do we make our own petitions. When Jacob is returning home and hears that Esau is coming after him, he makes the following prayer:

> O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, "Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good," I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and faithfulness which you have shown me, your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau. (Gen. 32)

We have to remind our heavenly Father of His promises. We do not praise God because of His abstract perfections, but because of the concrete favors He has granted us in the past, because of what He has done for us lately. Prayer of thanksgiving and praise is thus the best prayer of petition. It is the best way to remind myself that God does have a care for me, that He loves me, that He is with me in my work and play. And that is the real reason that I pray at all.

It also keeps me from the drearier forms of self-pity. It gives me hope in the future and energy for the present. That energy is supposed to be expended for the benefit of others, for the salvation of souls, for His greater glory. The Lord sees me as involved in various communities and in a tangle of friendships, kin, and less holy relationships. All these I bring to my thanksgiving, although inevitably it starts with me and generally ends there.

## Make a Joyful Noise

*Thomas E. Clarke, S.J.*

One of the wisest remarks about prayer I've ever heard came from Father Edward ("Abe") Ryan, who taught Church history at Woodstock when I was a scholastic there in the late forties. The most enigmatic Jesuit I've ever met, Abe was widely regarded as a mystic.

Once, during or after my confession, Abe said simply, "We all pray more and better than we think." Through the years that consoling statement has helped me personally and in the impossible ministry of talking to others about prayer.

Later on, when I came to teach at Woodstock, one facet of Karl Rahner's theology of grace provided a theoretical base for Abe's remark. Rahner's insistence that grace always operates at a deep level of consciousness—*Selbstbewusstsein* was the intimidating term, I recall—sparked in me the insight that prayer in its fundamental reality is nothing more and nothing less than *faith* and that we might describe the indefinable by saying that *prayer is faith in the dimension of consciousness.*

This blend of Abe Ryan's pragmatic wisdom and Karl Rahner's transcendental metaphysics of grace has illuminated for me the Pauline "pray always" and the Ignatian "finding God in all things," along with Nadal's characterization of Ignatius as "simul in actione contemplativus." Provided—what a big proviso it is!—we act from faith, we are praying, realizing the fruition of prayer.

In such a view, prayer in general and contemplation in particular cease to be centered on special times apart (however necessary these may be), but on every exercise of true, meaning faith-filled, action. Being *simul* contemplative in action then becomes, not so much the overflow of contemplation (as in Chautard's *Soul of the Apostolate* or even in the Dominican "contemplari et contemplata aliis tradere"), as the exercise of a faith that is at its very core both contemplative and ageric. *All* genuine action is contemplative, and contemplation is

a specific form of action.

I say more. Bill Callahan's "noisy contemplation" brings Christian and Ignatian prayer to the conflicted crossroads of humankind's journey. The noise, says Ps. 95, is the "joyful noise to the Lord" for which we were born. For Jesuits, among others, its central enactment is not the noise of solemn ritual assemblies, but the places where people groan and shout, say yes and no to one another in conflict, stumble forward and fall back a little, and savor the remarkable experience described by our forebears as *sobria ebrietas*. Whenever anyone dares in faith to embrace—even squeeze a little—the human condition, prayer is happening and God is known. Then, according to the measure of grace, the noise can become apophatic, a faint echo of that joyful blast of the divine Silence, the singing of God's Word into our flesh, the clamorous sound of the Great Wind that in spite of all is renewing the face of the earth.

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## What I Do When I Pray

*John A. Coleman, S.J.*

How do I pray? Faithlessly! Why, then, do I continue to pray or constantly restart formal prayer when I let it lapse for a time? I pray for three reasons. First, wondrously, God never ceases to stir up in me urgent longings to be more intimate with him and more interior to myself than I usually am. (At the conscious level I think of myself as complex, perhaps, but superficial, and my superficiality disturbs me a great deal as I grow older.) Secondly, as a spiritual director, talking to others about their prayer moves me deeply and stirs me to pray, too, if for no other reason, for credibility. Finally, I truly believe from experience—especially during times of intense prayer

during retreat—that prayer constitutes my major avenue to that constant *conversio morum* which, I take it, is the heart of religious life.

I pray in different patterns. My most ordinary form of prayer each morning consists in using a formula from the morning prayer of the *Book of Common Prayer* (Anglican) and the readings for the day's Liturgy. I pay attention, especially, to two things in this prayer. First, I treasure the Ignatian insistence that we know what it is we want to pray for. Finding my heart's desire for that day (or that period of life, since, obviously, I do not shift what I pray for from day to day) seems to me an excellent way to center, focus, and be attentive. I find myself most frequently praying that God would teach me or lead me below the surface or free me from my compulsions. I truly believe that we can do little more in prayer beyond bringing to God our deepest longings. Finding them is our work in prayer. The "gift of prayer" is God's work, his gentle answer to these longings. Some mornings this first type of prelude becomes the whole time of prayer. (I pray formally for about forty to forty-five minutes.)

I also pay attention when doing the *lectio pia* part of the readings to any one phrase which stirs me as I read the Scripture readings slowly several times. I listen to find in it my mantra for the day (usually a simple word or phrase). When found, the mantra represents the core of my prayer. I chant it until it seems right to fall silent. Some time ago I bought Tibetan sandalwood mantra beads (I tell people they are worry beads!) to use at various times of the day, when walking or in a quiet place, to repeat the mantra. It is important to me to feel that this mantra was a gift to me and not, merely, self-willed.

At night, before retiring, I read the evening prayer from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* and write in my journal. This is my form of the Ignatian examination of consciousness. As an extrovert, I love shared prayer and the Liturgy, where I bring to the Lord the people who touch my life.

On retreat I can focus much more on Ignatian contemplation. I

find this kind of active imagination works for me only when I have time for repetition of the Gospel scene. Even then I frequently end up chanting (literally) a personal mantra from the Gospel scene. When I experience extreme stress or conflict (for example, when my favorite brother was dying), I use colored art markers and sketch paper to doodle-draw near unconscious symbols/colors of my longing, mood, and conflict to help me get over the block and bring my feelings to God. As I grow older, I seek to dwell in a simple image, let it soak in, breathe in a mantra. I am a very, very slow learner in the spiritual life.

One thing puzzles me deeply. I actually love to talk about prayer in the context of spiritual direction. In other contexts I am uncomfortable talking about it. Maybe it is too personal or I fear that some very simple image, mantra, or feeling (dear to me) will seem banal outside the context of prayer. Maybe one reason I can talk about prayer in spiritual direction is my feeling that this communication is, itself, a kind of prayer. Perhaps talk about prayer best takes place in an atmosphere which is, itself, a prayer. In any event, I talk to others about prayer only in spiritual direction or from the pulpit.

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## God at Prayer

*Joseph F. Conwell, S.J.*

It was some forty years ago that I discovered Emile Mersch's *Morality and the Mystical Body*, in which the author remarks that we are all "a cry for help." By our very existence we are a prayer, an anguished cry for assistance. The "primal scream" is a scream for God. We are always at prayer.

It was sometime later that I discovered that the Baltimore Catechism had botched the definition of prayer, calling it "the lifting up of the mind and heart to God." It came, if I recall correctly, from St. John Damascene, who really meant that prayer is having the mind and heart lifted up by God. There is a difference. If God does the lifting, then God is the author of the primal scream within me. The prayer within me is God talking to God on my behalf.

A much more recent remark by Thomas Merton helped fill out the picture. "If you want to pray, you are already praying," he wrote, or words to that effect. The desire to pray is the evidence that God is already at work at prayer in me.

No wonder Paul could write about the Spirit groaning within us in words that are incomprehensible. We all have an interior gift of tongues intelligible to God alone.

No wonder a tertian could say to me about his prayer during the long retreat, "Sometimes I just watch Jesus praying within me." No wonder an older veteran could say about his eight-day retreat, "Sometimes I just let Jesus do the praying."

It is my own conviction that God answers prayer, that as soon as we pray God starts the process which brings about an answer to prayer. It is not always easy to recognize the answer as an answer. When we are confused by the events in our lives, it is good to ask, "What have I been praying for?" Sometimes the very question illumines the events and reveals the answer.

Life is a prayer dialogue: My very existence is a cry for help, God's cry for help within me on my behalf—and what happens all around me is God's response to His prayer within me.

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## Prayer Influencing Daily Life

*Robert Doran, S.J.*

Three kinds of prayer have a place in my life on a regular basis: personal meditation, the Eucharist, and at least the Office of Readings and Morning Prayer from the breviary. The first and third of these occur always early in the morning, and personal prayer sometimes again just before going to bed at night. Personal prayer is now almost always a matter of silent, almost wordless, inner surrender to the incomprehensible mystery of God. The length of time varies, depending on what I need to be in tune with the God who creates and sustains every good desire.

Apostolic experiences profoundly affect my vision of things in prayer. Thus, most recently I find everything from my reading of the Gospel to my felt understanding of who God is to be undergoing a shift to a new key as a result of ministry to persons with AIDS and their friends and families. What is happening here is still inarticulable but very real, and is in part a gift of AIDS patients to me. Jesus is taking on a new face as sufferer, healer, and conqueror of death.

Dreams have been for nearly twenty years very significant ciphers of my relation to God and world. I do not dream as much now as I did a few years ago, but the strength of one dream can remain with me for months, until it is time for another one. I am very grateful for this grace.

## Centering: An Ignatian Approach

*David L. Fleming, S.J.*

One of the techniques in praying which Ignatius of Loyola emphasizes in his classic book, *The Spiritual Exercises*, is the use of preludes. He also draws our attention to a preparatory prayer at the beginning of every formal prayer time. It is the prayer we commonly call "putting ourselves in the presence of God." Ignatius, however, more carefully nuanced this traditional notion with an attitude articulated in three movements: "Everything I think, everything I want, everything I do" is for God and for the praise and reverence of God. This is always the attitude, the way I enter into this privileged time of formal prayer—my conversation with God.

The prelude which most draws our attention in this reflection is the prelude of desire—the *id quod volo* ("that which I want")—in our everyday prayer. I believe that this prelude can function in itself as a way of centering our prayer. Let me describe this way of centering in an Ignatian manner.

After placing myself in the presence of God in the usual way, I ask myself the question, What is it that I want from God this day? The question necessarily calls me to preview my day, trying to foresee the people with whom I will be dealing, the places I will go, the activities in which I will be involved. As my mind rapidly passes over all of this matter, I may find myself asking God's help in a myriad of details which fill the screen of my life this day. But the question does not find resolution in the many daily needs of life—true as the need of God remains for the whole of my life. Rather, the question presents itself more deeply and more pointedly. Where is it that I really seek God's strong presence in my day? And so I enter more into my own depths and find my attention drawn to one special person or one event—perhaps a hurting person with whom I must deal or a very difficult conflict situation for which I have some responsibility. In the face of these two situations, I ask again my question, What is

it that I really want from the Lord? I may quickly pray that God give me strength or that God give me light. But I still feel restless, perhaps somewhat superficial.

The question drives me yet deeper down into the stillness of my heart. What is it that I ask of the Lord this day? Now I begin to find myself getting quiet; perhaps, if I were to become aware of it, even my breathing is slow and relaxed. Spiritual writers over the ages have searched for images to describe entering into one's human depths. Is it like leaning over the edge of the well and first watching, then listening to the bucket drop deeper and deeper into the darkness until finally it makes contact with the water? Is it like entering into a cave which leads steeply downwards, with the passageway dark and the footing uncertain? Yet the darkness, the coolness, the sense of cavernous space is ultimately not so much frightening as awe-filled. Somehow, while I have a sense of going deep, I also could describe it as more a movement to the center of myself. Again, it is as if I had to reach through many layers of clothing before I can touch the warmth of skin and feel the beating heart. It is as if there were a maze of rooms to pass through before I sense being in "my heart room." (The "heart room" is a beautiful expression used by Sister Mary Terese Donze, A.S.C., in a prayer book for children called *In My Heart Room* [Liguori, Missouri: Liguori Publications, 1982]).

When I am there, the question "What do I want of the Lord today?" may not seem all that important to answer. Maybe I will now have words to articulate the *what*. Perhaps not. But in my heart room, I am where Christ is, and that is enough. The searching is over, the question is being met rather than being answered. I do not need to ask, "Is it the Lord?" I have found the Lord.

How long does this moment of prayer take? I think that it can all take place rather quickly at times. If so, I may then find myself immersed in the particular prayer content of my formal personal-prayer time. Commonly for me it is the Scripture texts of the Eucharist for the day. Sometimes it may be the readings of the Liturgy of the Hours. Perhaps it will center on the life story of the saint of the

day.

There are times, however, when the process itself of going deep down inside myself or trying to find my way to my heart room fills the time I have available for my daily prayer. I seem to struggle more at certain times to make the journey within, to quiet myself down enough so that I do not keep running around in a circle, avoiding the pathway in. At other times I am content just to be there where my quest(ion) has taken me. I rest there content for the whole time of my formal prayer period.

From my own experience, I would suggest that "asking for the grace" can well serve as an Ignatian approach to a centering of our daily prayer.

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## Reflections on My Ways of Praying

*George E. Ganss, S.J.*

The ways in which I pray now seem to be the result of many happenstances. On second thought, however, I see God's providence in them, time after time resetting switches which guided me in new directions. An important start was the novitiate formation in methods of discursive meditation and affective mental prayer as explained in Rodriguez. The usefulness of those methods wore out like the exercises in English composition we received in high school. But they remained a stage of training which I am glad I went through. A simplifying process occurred, a peaceful gazing on God which directors encouraged and called contemplation.

As the years of theology slipped along, I somehow developed a hobby of hunting for definitions of prayer. In the end I found nothing

more comprehensive and satisfying than the Baltimore Catechism's statement that prayer is the lifting of the mind and heart to God, to adore Him, to thank Him for His benefits, to ask His forgiveness, and to ask for all our needs of soul and body. This renewed meeting with an old friend made me feel peacefully contented and led me to exclaim: That too can be simplified. Prayer is getting into interior contact with God, by any method.

At that time, too, I happened upon a passage in St. Ignatius's letter of September 20, 1548, to St. Francis Borgia, and found it unusually helpful. According to St. Ignatius, each one must experiment to find the way in which God communicates Himself most effectively to him. Ever since, my methods of praying varied continually, sent into new directions by the experiences of daily living and the needs or moods they bring. I remained convinced that day after day there must be effort to get into direct contact with God in formal prayer. But the prayer experience widened to include many informal ways as well.

Then, as the courses in theology advanced, I noticed that the motivating force usually attributed to prayer was coming also in a new and more powerful way from the great mysteries of faith—such as the Incarnation or grace—about which we were studying. The study was becoming prayer, a form of "prayerful reading" (*lectio divina*). Confirmation along this path came from Tanquerey's preface in our textbook, *The Spiritual Life*: "Dogma is the foundation of spiritual theology, and an exposition of what God has done and still does for us is the most efficacious motive of true devotion." All of Ignatius's letters about finding God in all things tended in the same direction: "In the midst of action and studies, the mind can be lifted to God; and by means of thus directing everything to the divine service, everything is prayer" (letter to Berze dated December 24, 1553).

How, then, do I pray today? Pretty much by a varying combination of everything above. There is search for contact with God. Affective love is a good to be sought, but more important is growing

effective love. Prayer doesn't have to be always laborious; it should be a satisfying and pleasing experience. It can be a matter of feeling at home with our loving God.

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## How I Pray

*Donald L. Gelpi, S.J.*

How do I pray? The question comes at an interesting time in my own journey. I have been keeping a prayer journal since 1973. I had sensed patterns in the entries; but last year I reviewed the entire journal with my spiritual director and discovered more there than I had suspected. I have, of course, experienced my share of dryness and desolation in prayer, as the journal testifies, though less so, it seems, as the years go on. The experiences of dryness and darkness aside, however, the positive prayer experiences I have recorded in my journal seem to fall with surprising neatness under four categories: calls, words, insights, and feelings.

I touch and am touched by God in many ways, but the experience of vocation, of call, surely ranks as one of the most fundamental. I initially fought my vocation to the Society, only to give in eventually in exhaustion. The call experiences I have recorded in my journal have, it seems to me, given both direction and purification to my own sense of vocation. I have experienced a persistent call to give high priority to the apostolate of scholarship and to approach the work with greater detachment and less ego-involvement. I have experienced repeated calls to repent of a variety of disordered attitudes, most, though not all, rooted in neurotic anxiety. I have experienced repeated calls to grow in love, in faith, in openness, in selflessness, and in concern for the poor. I have experienced a growing call

to live present to God in the different things I do and to find joy in my work. Some call experiences focus directly on my relationship with God: a call to greater simplicity in dealing with God, a call to focus in prayer on the figure of Jesus, a call to renewed devotion to Christ in the Eucharist, a call to grow in reverence, a call to trust God in the process of ageing, a call to grow in the fruits of the Spirit. Repeated calls to a new kind of discipline in my life helped ease me over the mid-life crisis. Finally, a certain number of graces of call have simply confirmed my original vocation to the Society.

Subsequent to my involvement in the charismatic renewal, I have also with more or less frequency recorded word experiences in prayer. These experiences have exhibited greater or less emotional intensity. Some have taken the form of words of call, like words that have summoned me to face and accept my own death, words that invite me to unconditioned trust in God, words that call me to abide in the presence of God. Some words have expressed rebuke. A significant number of word-graces, however, have simply assured me of the divine Persons' love and comprehension of me, despite my folly and limitations.

I find a third category of entries in my journal, experiences of insight. In graduate school I began praying with a pencil largely as a way of trying to deal with questions of faith that I could not answer. When I began to teach after finishing my doctorate, I prayed for the gift of teaching and found myself subsequently approaching both the things I taught and my students with greater prayerfulness. Insights into problems I deal with in my courses or in the research I do also come with regularity in prayer and constitute a significant number of the graces I experience.

A fourth and final set of journal entries records my own felt responses to the calls, words, and insights that come in prayer: feelings of love, of repentance, of openness to God, of divine presence, of healing, of joy. Often feelings find expression in prayers of petition. Since I tend to record in my journal any significant experiences that occur during prayer, I would think that the preceding description gives a fairly accurate portrait of how I have been praying since 1973.

## On Prayer and Praying

*Howard J. Gray, S.J.*

Two New Testament passages, both from Luke's Gospel, speak best to me about prayer and praying. These passages are Luke 11:1-4 and 10:25-37, the Lord's teaching on prayer and the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The Lucan account of Jesus' teaching on prayer says it all—simply yet wondrously comprehensively. Commentators on the Lord's Prayer appear in every age of Christian spirituality from Augustine to Teresa of Avila to Leonardo Boff. Such a tradition of saintly and expert reflection could intimidate and discourage any further response. Yet the disciples' earnest plea, "Lord, teach us to pray," echoes in the heart of every Christian. Certainly, it has been my petition, continuing to ask as Ignatius did that God lead me in his self-disclosure. The Lord tells me that prayer is to find God as father, mother, friend; to experience the gracious empowerment of honoring God's name; to know the challenge of the Kingdom not yet fully here; to be reminded of life's essential rhythms and needs for bread, for forgiveness, for reconciliation, and for secure companionship even in the face of struggle and trial. It is, finally, a prayer which has helped me reinterpret the Principle and Foundation, to see in the Ignatian formula the same ordering of relationships, the same concern for essentials, the same invitation to be human in choosing life, not death.

The second passage, that of the Good Samaritan, may seem to be about action, not contemplation. But I think it is about being a contemplative even in action or, better, through action. In the fourfold ministry of the Samaritan—contemplative seeing (v. 33), affective response (v. 33), practical caring (v. 34), and sustained good even when one is absent (v. 35)—I discern the way one ought to grow in prayer. Praying is contemplative encounter with reality. Prayer is allowing one's heart and mind and emotions to be touched by what

one sees. Prayer is doing the good one can do with his or her talents, time, and opportunities. Prayer is learning how to create a community which will sustain the good begun. Prayer "does" this to us—makes us contemplative and compassionate neighbors to the world as it is, in order to make the world what God intended.

I also see in Luke 10:25-37 parallels to the four weeks of the Spiritual Exercises: seeing reality as wounded yet redeemed (Week 1); dwelling compassionately with that reality (Week 2); laboring to heal whoever and whatever is wounded (Week 3); and passing over, surrendering, and committing to others the task still to be done (Week 4).

For me, prayer and praying is letting the Lord teach me how to be a disciple. Over the years this has, gently, taught me to let Scripture interpret the Exercises, widening my own understanding of prayer as a moment of privileged revelation, calling me to be a little less afraid of the mission and its demands. Most of all, prayer and Luke's Gospel, especially, have become one. To pray is never to weary of asking, "Lord, teach me to pray."

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## Prayer of the Imagination

*Gerald R. Grosh, S.J.*

When as a novice I was presented the Ignatian contemplation during the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises, I thought it was dumb. It just seemed unreal, and I rather quickly discarded it as a method of prayer.

In the late sixties, while in doctoral studies, I became fascinated by the work of Carl Jung. Rather unconsciously, I think, I began to

use my imagination at prayer, along the lines suggested by St. Ignatius.

In 1971 I made my first privately directed retreat. The experience was preceded by several days of orientation, focusing largely on the use of imagination in prayer. One exercise was a dialogue with the body (à la Ira Progoff), and another directed us to choose any scene from Scripture and to imagine ourselves in it. After this latter exercise, someone volunteered to act out her prayer as a psychodrama. This psychodrama was a powerful experience for me as I watched it unfold. I was struck by the obvious love that the woman had for Jesus. I was also puzzled when she rejected two person's desires to participate with her in the psychodrama. These rejections struck me as "uncharitable," and I found them contradictory to the love I had perceived in the woman.

I would like to share two experiences of prayer of the imagination which happened to me during the retreat. The first responded to my puzzlement at the incidents during the psychodrama, and the second one responded to my prayer on the scene I had chosen from the Gospel.

On the fifth day of the retreat, my director suggested that I pray the mysteries of the baptism and temptations of Jesus. In praying the mystery of the temptations, I initially read the account in Luke and then slowly prayed over the account in Matthew. The second and third temptations are reversed in these accounts. I did not feel like praying when I began my prayer, but I was quickly drawn into it. As I read the text, I noted that the Lord was in the desert forty days before He was tempted. I wondered what was happening during these forty days. So I asked the Lord, "Were You in consolation or desolation?" That is, I wanted to know if He was experiencing the Father's love or not. I was aware that I did not get an answer. So I decided that He must have been in consolation, being shored up by the Father's love in preparation for ministry. In my imagination I then walked around in the desert with the Lord and sat down with Him as He shared with me His consolation. This lasted about fifteen or twenty minutes. I remember no details of this. Then I returned to

the text which said that He was *hungry*. Immediately I said, "Oh! You were in desolation" (physical hunger being a sign of spiritual hunger). So I returned to the desert and again walked around with the Lord, this time with Him in desolation. The big thing He shared with me was His desire to draw all men and women to the Father and His own frustration at having to be in the desert. This part also lasted about fifteen or twenty minutes. Again I returned to the text for the actual temptations. Jesus and the devil were on center stage while I was off to the side watching. Nothing significant happened to me during the first and second temptations. In the third temptation, the devil offered Jesus the whole world if He would just bow down and worship him. Jesus says no. I was very moved by this, since the Lord had been sharing with me how much He wanted the whole world. In my imagination I immediately moved to put my arm around Jesus in order to comfort Him. He pushed my arm away. I was shocked! Immediately, I said, "Why? What did I do? It's true I didn't feel like praying, but . . ." Then immediately it hit me. It was the Father's will that Jesus be without His consolation or human (my) consolation at this time. Though I had not been consciously thinking about the psychodrama, I also immediately understood this as an answer to my puzzlement. The woman had "rejected" others because the scene had to be a certain way; it was God's will.

You can interpret this in whatever way you want. For me it was a powerful teaching about God's will which I would choose over all the books I read on the subject. I was also aware of the freedom or lack of control that happens in the prayer of the imagination. There's no way that I would have consciously chosen to put my arm around Jesus (at that time in my life) or to have Him repulse this effort.

Now to the second prayer. The scene that I had chosen for myself during the preparation days was the washing of the feet at the Last Supper. I did not allow the Lord to wash my feet. The thrust of the prayer was that I wanted to understand why the Lord wanted to wash my feet. On the eighth day of the retreat (it lasted eleven days), my director suggested that I pray the Last Supper and Gethsemane. It took me a while to get into relationship with the Lord

during the prayer of the Last Supper because I was denying my real feelings. However, once I got in touch with myself, I was in easy relationship with the Lord, and the prayer flowed. The washing of the feet took up very little time in the prayer. The Lord washed my feet and it was no big deal. I saw Peter protest and I thought, That's just Peter! The bulk of the prayer was spent on the other things. If I had not done a review of the prayer, I would not have realized the significance of what had happened in the prayer. I reviewed the prayer, writing it down chronologically as it flowed. When I came to the washing of the feet, I wrote, "The Lord washed my feet and I didn't protest, because—" I then burst into tears because I was going to write, "I understood." I remembered the fantasy I had prayed before the retreat and my own desire to understand the significance of the washing of the feet.

There is much more I could write about the prayer of the imagination. In the 1970s I used to say, "The Lord taught me more through the prayer of the imagination than in any other way." He has used some other ways since then! But I hope that this essay whets your appetite for this form of prayer.

As I write this essay in August 1989, I am faced with lung cancer and the possibility of death. I have marshaled many forces to combat the cancer. One of them is daily use of my imagination. If I'm still alive in 1995, you will know that it has been helpful!

## Reflections on My Practice of Prayer

*Robert F. Harvanek, S.J.*

First, when I hear or read the word "prayer," I don't immediately think of liturgy, though I should; nor do I think of talking to God or the saints, as Ignatius does. I don't think of the examens, nor do I think of the Prayer of the Hours. On second thought, I think of all these activities; but my first thought is of the time (hour) of meditation as it was once prescribed in the Society, and in fact by the Church for religious.

My first reflection is that my prayer (meditation) has been formed by the Spiritual Exercises. This is a commonplace for Jesuits, but let me specify that a little. I'm sure I have been much influenced by the "points for meditation" given by retreat directors and spiritual fathers in my early days in the Society, and by meditation books written by Jesuits. But, as years have gone by, I have found myself structuring my prayer as the Exercises are structured. I have seen this structure as similar to the structure of the Prayer of the Hours. Essential to the time of prayer are offering it to the Divine Majesty at the beginning and closing it with the Our Father or some other prayer at the end. I have found each of the parts of the Exercises as Ignatius gives them useful in themselves as modes of prayer, not only as elements in a particular contemplation, but also when taken separately.

The three methods of prayer, particularly the second and third methods, as Ignatius gives them in the book of the *Exercises*, I have also found very helpful, especially in my latter years. I have long been attracted by these methods or modes and was fortunate to find, after a long search, Fr. Calveras's book *Los Tres Modos de Orar*. It was both stimulating and informative. When all else fails, one of these methods seems to work. The actual text of the *Exercises* itself always seems to be helpful in prayer.

My second reflection is that what I do in the hour—the text I

use, the structure I follow—is simply my activity and not really the prayer that takes place. I rely on the Exercises at this juncture and see prayer as the action of God making use of me. I see the phrase in the Tenth Part of the Constitutions, *instrumentum conjunctum cum Deo* ("an instrument in the hands of God"), as expressive of this belief. It is frequently remarked that there is no particular form of prayer peculiar to the Society. I have never been able to understand this. It has always seemed to me that all Jesuit prayer, in all its modes, is prayer of the governance of God. What we do is respond to God's grace and open ourselves to His action as He uses us to further His plan for His kingdom. The consolation of the prayer is not in the prayer itself but in the way in which we are supported in the mission or the work that is given us.

What I am trying to communicate here is expressed in the formula found in Hevenesi's *Sparks from Ignatius*. It is popularly known in its somewhat heretical form, "Pray as though everything depends on God, act as though everything depends on you." Hevenesi's formula avoids the heresy and expresses the Ignatian insight: "Trust in God, but with the awareness that, if the work is to be done, you will have to do it; give yourself to the work, but in the knowledge that, if it will be accomplished, it is God who will do it."

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## Reflection on My Prayer

*David Hassel, S.J.*

There have been four privileged times of prayer in my life. The first happened in freshman year of college, when I thought that the one self-evident fact of my life was that I would never be a priest. I

would be a chemical engineer and marry a girl I had met at nearby Mundelein College. Then, during a midterm retreat which had all the delicate atmosphere of a zoo out of control, I heard deep within me the message, "You have not decided against the priesthood." When my spiritual director told me this was merely my imagination, I said to him, "Those are the sweetest words I've ever heard." I went away in great peace, only to have the message repeated quietly and gently on the tennis court, on the bus to school, during an occasional class, at a dance, in the grocery delivery truck. After five more visits over the year to my spiritual director (who had deftly informed me that I was too weak, vain, and sensuous ever to become a priest), he told me to write down my reasons pro and con. Later he said, "Well, maybe you ought to try the novitiate. But you won't last."

Filled with his confidence in me, I entered the novitiate and, to my surprise, had a second prayer experience during the eighth day of the long retreat. Again, deep within me I heard, "You're at home, aren't you?" And I was.

Later, during my first year of philosophy, I experienced for some months a piercing loneliness and felt that somehow I had lost my vocation. I confessed this to a longtime friend and fellow scholastic over a two-hour period during which he said not a word. Then, putting his arm around my shoulders, he gave me a small hug and said simply, "Dave, when you start thinking about others and forgetting yourself, you're going to be a lot happier." It was as though the Lord had spoken to me and over the next few weeks peace finally returned to me.

In my first year of regency I met a senior high-school class which would turn out to be the most sophisticated and difficult class I would ever teach in thirty years. It contained most of the players from our city-champion football team, plus some rather zany non-sports personalities. Daily, after a breakfast consisting of black coffee, which I felt was pouring out through a thousand holes in my stomach, 4-C and I met at 8:30 a.m. I felt like a lion tamer without whip, chair, and pistol as we studied—irony of ironies!—Cicero's *On Friendship*, to be followed by that favorite classic of high-school

football players, Virgil's *Aeneid*. During this gruesome year, I discovered empirically that each evening I needed to pray one hour in order to have the strength to meet 4-C the next day at 8:30 a.m. This was my fourth privileged time of prayer—"hardly consoling" in both meanings of this term.

The fifth happened some six years ago during a retreat, when I was lamenting to the Lord how eight out of twenty-three members of my 1955 ordination group had left the priesthood, married, and deserted the needy Church and me. It seemed then that the Lord suddenly said to me, "Those are my men, not your guys. Get off their backs." Part of the healing here came when a fellow Jesuit of the 1955 group said to me, after I had told him my prayer experience, "Bitterness is sweet, isn't it, Dave?" Not pleasant but rather effective.

Descriptions of my prayer experience itself, which has been largely learned from my directness, is drearily catalogued in three books I've written: *Radical Prayer*, *Dark Intimacy* (sold only at airports), and *Healing the Ache of Alienation*. A fourth book is at my long-suffering publisher, Paulist Press; it is called *The Last Estrangement/The Final Embrace*. The title indicates well the last dilemma of my so-called prayer life.

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## A New Devotion

*John C. Haughey, S.J.*

Ignatius was desirous that Jesuits never cease to aspire to growth in devotion. By this he meant that increasingly we should have the experience of finding God in all things. But we won't find God in thing-things if we don't find God in God-things, like devotions, for

instance. I had long ceased looking for or expecting that there was anything new in the matter of devotions. Happily, I was wrong. I want to share with you a new devotion I have found helpful.

I learned this devotion from Cardinal Suenens, of all people, with whom I have had a close working relationship for some fifteen years. He calls it a Fiat Rosary. Since I had ceased using the rosary some years ago, as I suspect many of you have as well, I should elaborate why this has been a much more devotional experience for me than the traditional rosary had proven to be.

I have found that reentry into nine mysteries from the life of Jesus (three each from the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries) done regularly, howsoever briefly, serves to recall the second, third, and fourth weeks of the Exercises.

I found that this kind of prayer, like any experience of devotion, awakens love. It situates my heart in relationship with Mary and, in turn, with her Son, particularly in the paschal process he underwent. The first mystery of the nine is her *fiat*; the last mystery is her Assumption into Heaven.

One of the other values for me is that it gets my anima back into a better alignment with my animus. For you non-Jungians, this means that my analytic, manager, thinker, activist, adult self gets back into a healthy tension with my feeling, imagining, wondering, intuiting, childlike self. Insofar as this tension is lacking, I find that I fall back into a thought faith rather than a felt faith.

Ongoing devotions that evoke devotion or devotedness to God and God's ways and God's will are achievements of the heart. I have found this particular devotion reawakens the sensitivities needed to do God's work rather than our work for God. This difference is resident in the basic meaning of *fiat*.

Since I had always gotten lost in its interminable Hail Marys, the traditional rosary did not help my devotion. By way of contrast, the fact that you only say three Hail Marys with each mystery keeps the mystery central and savored.

Two other advantages of this kind of prayer are

1. Its brevity. This makes the saying of it much more likely.

One can say it in the interstices of our many demanding duties—between phone calls, while walking to meals or across the campus.

2. Its requiring no special "equipment," not even the physical rosary after you get used to the process.

Speaking of equipment, let me recommend that you procure a different rosary than the one you have in the drawer or in your pocket if you wish to experiment with this prayer. You could buy a chaplet rosary or, even better, manufacture a new one from one of your old rosaries. It will probably mean more to you if you make your own than if you use one that is too easily come by.

The recommended formula begins with an informal prayer asking that the Spirit assist us in living in union with Mary the mysteries of our Faith. It then petitions that we be enlivened by the grace of our baptism, nourished by the Eucharist, and renewed by the grace of Pentecost, in order to live today as faithful witnesses to the Heart of Christ. The third "bead" in this introductory troika reminds us to pray in specific terms for the Church, the world, and our own intentions. This is followed by the only Our Father in the whole rosary.

The joyful mysteries are the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Nativity. Each calls for three Hail Marys followed by a Glory Be.

The sorrowful mysteries are the Agony in the Garden, the Carrying of the Cross, and the Crucifixion. They also call for three Hail Marys followed by a Glory Be.

The glorious mysteries are the Resurrection, Pentecost, and the Assumption; these too suggest three Hail Marys followed by a Glory Be.

The final prayer is the Hail, Holy Queen.

Try it. You'll like it!

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## Praying over Experiences

*Peter Henriot, S.J.*

In my personal experience as a Jesuit "pray-er," I find that I'm a "plodder"—many desires, much effort, few results (or at least not the "results" I'd hope for).

Yet in my struggle to pray, I'm encouraged by a remark I read several years ago in Georges Bernanos's *Diary of a Country Priest.* A dialogue takes place there between the priest and a young agnostic. The priest admits that he wants very much to pray, yet feels he really doesn't pray so well. The young agnostic answers that he thinks "wanting to pray" should itself be a very good prayer. Recalling Ignatius's wisdom on the importance of desires, I'm grateful for the graced desire—the "wanting to pray"—which has stayed with me through the years of "plodding."

Probably my best prayer comes after some experience which has strongly affected me. For I need then to reflect before God on that experience, to get in touch with my feelings about it, to understand more deeply its meaning for my future.

For example, I've felt propelled to pray about my own faith in a loving God after talking with a mother who is dying of cancer and leaving several small children. Being asked to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation with a person who is struggling to stay close to God has moved me to prayer over my own sinfulness and God's mercy. After a street person has told me a story of hopeless loneliness, I have prayed with gratitude for God's care for me through my family and my community.

I've prayed to know how to love the Church and to work within it for change when I've experienced anger at the Church's treatment of women and minorities. Seeing children who are desperately hungry in Washington, DC, and in Zambia has driven me to pray for sensitivity to the poor and strength to work for justice. Talking with a friend about her or his prayer life has challenged me to open myself

more readily to the Spirit's movement in my own prayer.

Another set of experiences which moves me to prayer is the memory of God's action in my life—in vocation, ministry, community, joys and sorrows. This exercise of remembering inevitably gives rise to new gratitude and renewed trust.

I like to recall in prayer the moment I said, "Yes, I'll enter the novitiate" and the moments I've said, "Yes, I'll stay in the Society." Or the occasions of ministering and being ministered to in parish settings. Or the support of my community during a faith sharing about my future apostolate. Or the happiness I've felt with close friends within and outside the Society, and the sadness I've felt in situations of failure and frustration.

God, I know, has been very much present in each and every one of these experiences. To remember them is to be in touch with the God of my history, and moves me to prayer.

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## Homilies as Prayer

*J. Leo Klein, S.J.*

A particularly holy place in my life lies in preparing and giving homilies for Sunday celebrations of God's word.

One of the best blessings of my life was a series of three courses on the Synoptic Gospels that I audited during graduate-school days. Understanding the nature and power of the Gospels opened up a new chapter in my life which has never come to a close. I realized that the text of Scripture could put us in touch with the experience of the early Christians and help us understand the meaning of our

life today as life in Christ.

The parable of the wheat and the weeds at the center of Matthew's Gospel has helped me be patient with the ambiguity of myself and everyone and everything else around me. Understanding myself as the field where some seed falls on hardened ground, some in thorns, where some seed yields a harvest—and all at the same time! —has protected me from a perfectionism and discouragement which by now could have done irreparable damage to me and to others near me and in my care.

Luke's pilgrim journey to Jerusalem helps me—and others through my preaching—to realize the *gradual* progress of Christian life and the need to leave behind what is familiar and comfortable in order one day to reach the holy city at the end of the journey.

The central story of the Prodigal Son at the heart of Luke's Gospel has convinced my mind and my heart that God never gets angry with me but always watches and waits for me to come to my senses. I couldn't make God angry if I tried to, but I could—and do —bring tears to God's eyes as he watches and waits.

I believe that such modest success as I've had in communicating this to others who came to hear the word of God is enough to "justify" my entire life as a Jesuit priest, although preaching is not at all my "main occupation." Having light to understand Scripture and voice to share it is sacred ground for me where I feel most near to God.

I know from the occasional reactions of others who hear my homilies that the word of God has reached them, challenged them, supported them. I feel so deeply that my words are just a servant of the Gospel message. God said what God wanted to say and I was the middle man! I am humble and grateful to be called to that ministry. This is prayer for me and for others, the point of clear contact with God.

## Jesuit Prayer and Action

*Philip Land, S.J.*

Like all Jesuits I ponder the relation between prayer and action. Like all Jesuits I seek guidance here from our Founder. But temperament, experience, theology, even movement of the Spirit, move individual Jesuits to read somewhat differently Ignatius's Life, Exercises, Constitutions. Thus, this highly personal—and ever-provisional—statement of mine.

My prayer is action-oriented. It is Jesus' "Thy Kingdom come —on earth as it is in heaven."

But I am ever mindful of Ignatius's "interior things from which force must flow to the exterior." So, yes, I have my fairly regular times of contemplation directly oriented toward God, my periods of intimate union and familiarity with Abba-Father, Jesus-Son, and Holy Spirit.

But three observations: First, much of this interiority is itself action—of willing, choosing, striving; second, my contemplation (following Rahner) cannot be disembodied: it is chock full of encounter with God Incarnate, God embodied, God ever renewed in incarnateness.

My third observation is this: If there is union with God in prayer, there is more definitive union with God in action. Doesn't the Gospel tell me that I encounter God in my neighbor? "When you gave a cup of water, you did it to me." And aren't we instructed by John that, if we cannot love the brother whom we can see, we cannot love God whom we do not see? On this Rahner builds his explicit unification of love of God and neighbor.

That love undergirds Ignatius's apostolic bent. We are not Dominicans who contemplate and then pass on the fruits of their contemplation; much less is ours the Benedictine pairing of prayer and manual labor. The consequence for Ignatius is that our spirituality is to be as *instrumenta conjuncta*, living instruments joined to the hand

of the God who builds the Kingdom. In action for that Kingdom. In service of my neighbor. In love-inspired action.

So we are to "find God in all things," in interpersonal relations and social action for justice and peace (and in action for the integration of the whole of creation).

And, also, to be "contemplatives in action." First, to be conjoined instruments; second, to find God in all things; third, to be contemplatives in action. That means prayer centered on and derived from action. My own reflections on the relevant passages in Ignatius lead me to conclude that one is contemplative in action at three action-moments. The first is preparation for apostolic action—the force flowing to the exterior, but always action-oriented. The second is prayer following action, like liberation theology's reflection following praxis. The third is prayer in action, experiencing God as ground of my action, my action as co-creative, as *instrumentum conjunctum* —and even with moments of centering and of mantra stuffed into available nooks and crannies of the action. And last but not least, the action viewed as prayer in and of itself.

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## Structure and Content in Prayer

*Dominic Maruca, S.J.*

Experience has taught me that during times of formal prayer I need minimal structure together with solid content. Over the years I have found that a traditional Christian method which is also a basic Ignatian formula has provided such a simple, firm underpinning. I am speaking of a sense of gratitude for gifts received. "Quid retribuam Domino pro omnibus quae tribuit mihi?" (Ps. 116:12). I pray most

deeply when I have a sense of gratitude for all God's blessings and feel drawn to reciprocate with love.

Since the time of my ordination over thirty years ago, the Liturgy of the Hours and the daily Eucharist have served me best as vehicles for prayerful union with God. It is a rare day when some phrase from the daily readings fails to touch my heart or strike my mind with renewed force if only I make time to dwell on them in a leisurely manner. Most of my ministry has been with persons who also are praying the Liturgy of the Hours and celebrating a daily Eucharist. As a consequence, I have found my personal need for prayer and my pastoral responsibilities easy to integrate. (Any anxious preoccupation with possible pastoral implications of the material being considered is usually recognized as a distraction to be set aside.) *Lectio divina* is my preferred form of prayer.

The Ignatian prayer of recognition and responsibility—a title I prefer to "examen"—has been another method that has made fidelity to prayer easier for me. The formula provided in the *Spiritual Exercises* ([24-43]), however, is not the one I follow. I understand that exercise as one more suitable for persons engaged in the work of the First Week, disposing themselves for the grace of initial conversion. The exercise which Ignatius prescribes for us as a daily lifetime practice (Constitutions, [261]), I think should follow the lines of the Contemplation *ad amorem*. Accordingly, I devote most of my time to acknowledging the flow of blessings streaming from the love of the Trinity, and just a few moments to surveying the quality of my response, using a grid given to us forty-four years ago: *Sanctitas? Suavitas? Sapientia?* This enables me to monitor my relationships with God, other persons, and the world around me.

Other Ignatian methods have proved most serviceable over the years: the Triple Colloquy, which I find can be modified and applied to most of the graces which God holds out to me during prayer; the Application of Senses, an exercise I first discovered during tertianship and which I now use on major feast days, though I must honestly admit that I often lack the purity of heart prerequisite for the effec-

tive use of this method; the *Anima Christi* as the shortest, surest way to enter into familiar dialogue with the Lord.

Finally, the greatest obstacle I have found to prayerful union with God has been my preoccupation with what I had to do. Both temperament and training had led me to overemphasize the role of my willpower in entering into union with God and contributing to His design. I have had to learn repeatedly, assisted by reminders from a spiritual director, that all is grace. I have been a slow learner and a recidivist to boot! God has been very patient in teaching me that the key to communion with Him and collaboration in His service is patient waiting for His gift. I may work while waiting, but wait I must.

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## Prayer Is a Kaleidoscope

*Edwin McDermott, S.J.*

After fifty-three years in the Society of Jesus, I am convinced that preparing for prayer is essential. Before prayer I find myself asking a very basic question, Can God communicate with me? I am not ready to pray until I know He is present, because only then will I have a "confident assurance" that He can and does communicate with me.

Before I pray I also need to put myself into a soul silence. It takes time to silence all the noises of the soul and to find a conscious awareness of myself. If I fail to do this and rush into prayer, all the helps of Scripture and liturgies will be like museum pieces —bits of knowledge for the understanding, but not much for the

spirit.

When I have found silence in the center of my being, I then allow the words and works of Scripture to move into my consciousness like bits and pieces of materials in a kaleidoscope. The parables of Matthew, the Beatitudes of Luke, the symbols of John, all the Scriptures arrange themselves in an endless variety of forms and suggest many themes.

When I rotate these words of revelation, I discover new shapes and designs that stimulate wonderment and joy and peace. As I pause to respect these pictures, I find the meaning of St. Ignatius's petition for an *intima cognitio*. This is a holy time; God speaks. He gives shape to my thoughts and forms my images of His Son in the kaleidoscopic wonderment of prayers.

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## On Prayer

*Arthur F. McGovern, S.J.*

*A brief personal history of prayer.* Prayer came easily to me in my earliest years in the Society; the discovery of the "person" of Jesus was a tremendous gift. I remained doggedly faithful to an hour of prayer each day through ordination, but the content and form of prayer became more problematic. I doubted God's existence at times, and my prayer was too often dominated by negative feelings about myself. I could be happy throughout the day, only to become depressed at prayer time, believing I was a great disappointment to God and others. In the past twenty years or so, I have not devoted the amount of time to prayer that I once did; but paradoxically, when I do pray at different times during the week, my prayer has a quality

of joy and hope that it lacked in many of the years prior to ordination.

*Freedom in prayer: discarding some old admonitions.* Three passages from Scripture express for me what I now believe God wants to give to me through prayer. "I put before you life and death; choose life" (Deut. 30); "I want you to be happy" (Phil. 4); "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). With these as norms I gradually discarded all sorts of counsels that I had heard or read about prayer in earlier years:

1. "Don't count time spent on homilies as prayer." My best prayer, in fact most of my prayer, is time spent in preparing homilies. If I want to preach "good news" to others, I cannot afford the luxury of remaining depressed in prayer, and I cannot preach with integrity if I myself am not moved by Scripture.

2. "Don't seek for consolation in prayer or judge your prayer by emotions or insights gained." I do seek for consolation. I want to be filled with the spirit of Jesus—which I see as a spirit of joy, freedom, love, hope, and power. My most consoling prayers are prayers of gratitude. Almost all my retreats in recent years have been spent praying in gratitude. (I trust that both God and my retreat directors would not be leading me so constantly in this direction if this form of immensely consoling prayer was wrong.)

3. "Don't use spiritual reading as prayer." When dryness comes, I do not resign myself to it. I turn to spiritual reading and *count it* as prayer. Good spiritual reading, at a level that moves and challenges me, is not easy to find. (Walter Burghardt's homilies—see point 1 above!—touch me rather consistently, but other sources I have to experiment with.)

4. "Your prayer should be more passive, a prayer of quiet, of centering, of waiting, of listening." I will accept that others may be called to these; perhaps I did miss taking steps up the ladder of the unitive way. But I am a restless questioner, a searcher, a pragmatist looking for results; and I have come to accept—with confidence and joy—that a questioning, meditative form of prayer is best for me. For example, in praying the Gospels I imagine how Jesus "might

have acted" if he had my preoccupation with time, or how the leper might have remained locked up in a cave if he did not believe that Jesus could, and wanted to, heal him.

*Conclusion.* In short, then, I pray in ways that "give me life" and stir up in me a desire to give life to others. I need perhaps to pray more *about others* in order to love them more effectively, and *about the world* (though I am engaged in social issues, they do not enter into my prayer often). I could and should pray more. But as I look back on my life as a Jesuit, I am tremendously grateful for the gift of prayer, and the gift of the Spiritual Exercises above all.

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## My Experience as Pray-er

*J. J. Mueller, S.J.*

Prayer must make a difference in my life. I am not saying that every time I pray, it must deliver a payoff. My presupposition and Christian understanding comes from the Incarnation: God wishes to communicate with me.

I was within six months of finishing my doctoral dissertation. Assignments gradually were proposed covering various ministries: teaching in higher education, spiritual ministries, and other types of ministries. Unsure, yet willing to do a number of ministries, I wanted to know what the Province envisioned for me. My assigning provincial told me to "go pray about it." Although I was somewhat perplexed because I sought data and because I did not know if this was a stock spiritual answer deflecting the real, practical decision to be made, I knew he was serious; so I took it to prayer.

I wasn't sure what to do or how to proceed. Since the novitiate, Ignatius's autobiography, especially his praying over the Constitutions, impressed me as a model of discerning God's concern for a Jesuit. So I decided to use that as my model and get on with it. At 5:00 p.m. almost every day, I went to my room on the second floor of a two-story house, sat on the red rug with my back propped up against the wall, and talked to the Lord about the future. I don't know if I expected anything practical to happen; but I decided to give myself over to the process. Day after day, centering myself on the sun stream in a rectangular pattern across the floor, I tried one decision and then another. I put them on like clothes and wore them around, sometimes for a week. Unexpectedly, the ongoing conversation grasped me. I found layers within myself, and an active subconscious level that took days to clarify. The process was teaching me about communicating with myself and God. I gradually experienced that parts of the decision confused or depressed me; and what might begin enthusiastically lingered around for a few days and slipped unconvincingly away. I clung to Ignatius's own description of how he stayed with various answers, trying them out, and watching what happened to him. Instead of being separated from me by 450 years, he seemed to be waiting for me at that very moment.

One day—and I am not sure exactly how it happened—the light of clarity had become a conviction about a decision. I stayed with it for a few days more and found increasing joy and peace. Then I knew the process was over. I also knew that my decision to teach might not be the final one: the Province might ask otherwise and nearly did; but I also knew in my heart that I could live with other decisions.I have been extraordinarily happy teaching and I continue to live out of that experience of ten years ago. In my life that prayer over those months made all the difference.

## Praying in Truth

*Vincent J. O'Flaherty, S.J.*

In the Lucan parable, the Pharisee praying in the Temple—praying "to himself" the Jerusalem Bible puts it—was undoubtedly speaking the truth, so he thought, about himself. He did keep the commandments, at least as he understood them. He fasted and paid tithes. Like the rich young man, he had, or thought he had, been fulfilling all his life all his obligations to God, had been living according to the list of dos and don'ts his religious beliefs required of him. Like Paul, insofar as the Law can make a person perfect, he was faultless.

Even though, standing there in the Temple, he addressed his words to God, he was not so much praying to the God of his forefathers as he was displaying the results of his labor to a hardheaded, no-nonsense Employer-God to whom, as is normally the case of employees with respect to their employers, he was bound by a purely contractual relationship. Life had been assigned to him as a job to be carried out in a certain way. If he did his work well, adhered to the list, he would be, deservedly, well paid. His prayer, insofar as it could be called prayer, was a reminder to his Employer-God that he was up-front, dependable, steady on the job.

We get no impression that this good man experienced any intimacy with his God. But then, whoever said you had to like your boss, get chummy with him or her? Safer to keep a respectful distance, to carry out scrupulously what you were told to do, and to seize opportunities less enterprising fellow employees let slip by to put your accomplishments on display for your Employer to see. That way lay success—and it was, incidentally, a fine way of keeping God at a safe distance. It also made it religiously respectable to contemn less enterprising and conscientious fellow employees, made it downright justifiable to judge them.

Of all the false notions about God and human beings and life

that keep showing up in the history of Christian spirituality, this noxious delusion—that our task in this life is to earn heaven—has enjoyed extraordinary staying power among good people. It was certainly a delusion Jesus came up against constantly—one which he abhorred—in the religious milieu through which he moved.

In vivid contrast to the Pharisee, back somewhere in the shadows of the Temple, the parable tells us, stood a tax collector. Matthew in his Gospel puts tax collectors right out there with excommunicates. In his prayer this poor wretch—given his deplorable failings, an object of the Pharisee's scorn—gave no indication that he was going to give up tax collecting, that he *could* give it up, that he possessed the strength of character to do so. The tax collector prayed to God out of the depths of weakness, powerlessness, slavery to sin. He had nothing of his own with which to recommend himself to God, except the fact that in his desperate plight he could not save himself, that he needed to be rescued from his living death by Another. And whatever else he may have done, he had not—and he certainly had this going for him—given up on God.

He addressed God as One who has mercy, love, and grace in abundance to give, as if he had as much claim on God's mercy as even that sinless Pharisee up there in the front—that is, no claim at all. One detects in the tax collector's prayer no self-pity, no blaming others, no bad self-image, no discouragement, but rather a putting aside of illusions and a facing up to some fundamental facts—the fact of his sin, his plight and his need, the fact of God's love for him and of God's power and desire to save him from himself. And this man, this sinner stuck in his sin, having done with his praying went home—Jesus blows our minds by telling us—at rights with God.

Among the many rich treasures that can be mined from this parable is the realization that the fewer the illusions about ourselves we bring to prayer, the better. This is why the graces of the First Week are so indispensable to prayer. Two of those essential graces are the willingness to let go of all the illusions about ourselves that we cling to and the acceptance, at the heart of our existence, of who and what we really are, of who and what God is, Lover and Giver.

These are graces of the highest order because we *like*, instinctively, to live with the illusion that we can earn heaven and that God really is an Employer with whom a contractual relationship suffices, along with an occasional reckoning up of services rendered. Nothing, so a still, small voice whispering from the horizon of consciousness warns us, could be more difficult in life, more awful, really—all those things the Pharisee did, and didn't do, would be a snap in comparison—than to let go of the illusions about ourselves that we hug to ourselves as if they were the Holy Grail, or to accept and name ourselves as who we really are and let God be who and what God is, all we have and need. The voice tells us we could not bear this much stripping, that it would annihilate us. In a sense, it would. But such truth, given and accepted, along with the stripping, would bring with it a wondrous freedom, the freedom, for instance, that comes of no longer being ashamed of the truest truth there is about ourselves, that in authentic prayer to God, we can only stand—and it's all right to stand—naked.

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## My Experience of Prayer, Such as It Is!

*Michael O'Sullivan, S.J.*

Spiritual all-star I am not. For better or for worse, the nuances of meditation and/or contemplation have been lost on me. The concept of "making a retreat" and spending hours every day in prayer, whether focusing on a given theme or just allowing oneself to be led by the Spirit and/or one's director, just does not appeal to me—and, to be honest, really never has. The affective experience of God's personal love rarely occurs for me in "periods of prayer," when I

have quieted myself and tried to "pray." God just does not come alive for me in these ways.

Hopefully though, spirituality has not died in me. In fact, I find myself continually occupied with finding and experiencing God in my life. Who and what does God mean and where is God to be encountered? Jeremiah speaks of God and God's word as a fire burning inside him which he cannot ignore or hold in (Jer. 20:8f). His experience sounds familiar to me: even when God seems distant, the fire nevertheless burns inside and seeks expression.

Perhaps what means most to me in Ignatian spirituality is Ignatius's emphasis on the examen—the times throughout the day, and especially for a few minutes at the end of the day, when I slow myself down and reflect on what has been going on in my life and where God has been in all of it. As is true of most Jesuits, my days tend to be a blur of activity, most of which I try to make purposeful! What I cherish is quiet time early in the morning to spend alone by myself and focus myself for the day. In these early hours I try to exercise both physically and spiritually, to clear out the cobwebs and to energize myself for what lies ahead. During these times I sometimes find myself talking to God, sometimes talking to myself, sometimes just trying to put one foot in front of the other. Whatever I do seems to amount to the same thing: I am preparing to encounter a new day with its people, events, and God. The examen functions as a reflection on whom and what I am encountering, including God. At the end of the day, I make an effort to put the day in perspective and reflect on where I have encountered God, what I have learned about myself and others, and what I have learned about Jesus being alive in the world.

In short, for me, God and the Gospel message come alive in the day-to-day living out of my life. The Risen Lord makes himself felt affectively in the people and events I encounter during my day. My quiet time in the morning is not so much the time I encounter the Lord as the time I prepare to encounter God. The examen calls me to focus on whom and what I experienced—and Jesus comes alive again in the remembering, just as in the Eucharist.

## One Jesuit's Prayer

*Paul V. Robb, S.J.*

During the past twenty years, while exploring the dynamics and process of conversion, I have continually tried to reflect on prayer. Then, over the course of a few nights last January, I had a prayerful experience of prayer which I would like to share. Here it is as recorded in my journal.

Part of the exploration over these twenty years included reflecting on John of the Cross. He wrote these lines:

> Yet something else grieves and troubles a man in this state, and it is that, since this dark night impedes his faculties and affections, he cannot beseech God nor raise his mind and affection to Him. Indeed, this is not the time to speak with God, but the time to put one's mouth in the dust, as Jeremiah says, that perhaps there might come some actual hope [Lam. 3:29], and the time to suffer this purgation patiently. God it is who is working now in the soul, and for this reason the soul can do nothing. Consequently, a person can neither pray vocally nor be attentive to spiritual matters. (*Dark Night of the Spirit*, bk. 2, ch. 8, par. 1)

I also know from our experience that prayer can often keep people from finding the God who hides within and who speaks powerfully and intimately to us. Prayer can become a hindrance to God's invitation to explore the terrain of one's journey of conversion if we are afraid of both the darkness and the light of our lives. During these years we have tried to aid people to find the natural "pray-er" within rather than teaching methods and techniques.

My journal entry for January 15, 1989, reads as follows:

> What strikes me so forcefully tonight is that we can remember ourselves because God always remembers us. If it were up to us, much of our past would be excised, forgotten, covered over with layers of piety. But God loves us in all the details and circumstances of our lives; He never forgets us. There are so many

> references to this in the Jewish and Christian Testaments. We must let God be our Mother and not try to be the Divine Mother ourselves, but a woman/man learning to know and to love oneself, our brothers and sisters, and our Father/Mother God.

How correct Meister Eckhart is in saying that Jesus of Nazareth came as a "Reminder." "Christ is before all else the 'Reminder.' He reminds us of the truth that has been 'forgotten' and hidden from our conscious and subconscious minds" (C. F. Kelly, *Meister Eckhart on Divine Knowledge* [Yale University Press, 1977], 131). Jesus is the Reminder, because His Father remembers us and this is one of the things Jesus, the Word, came to teach us.

In my journal entry for January 16, 1989, I wrote these reflections:

> Prayer is not raising my mind and heart to God. When I raise my mind and heart, I often feel I leave or lose myself. Prayer is *LOWERING* my mind and heart to God present within me and to my "word" which God spoke in speaking me. Prayer is lowering my eyes to the one and the ones whom God remembers and loves and whom I would often want to forget with my sinfulness, my strayings, my slow learning in the school of experience. Then, somewhere and sometime along that journey path of conversion, God *RAISES* my eyes and opens my ears and expands my heart to Him; and my mind, not understanding, follows wherever He will lead, full of trust in the *ONE/THREE* whom I have seen and heard and touched and loved!

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## Jesuit Pray-ers

*Paul A. Soukup, S.J.*

Some trepidation accompanies this account of prayer, for I have long held the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality in high regard, perhaps too readily canonizing its members and their writings. We entered the Society at the same time, the Seminar and I; from the middle of my tertianship, the Seminar—like my fellow tertians in faith sharing—now asks an account of my prayer.

Prayer and my estimations of it have certainly changed over the years. At one time I envisioned a kind of novice ideal of mystical prayer. Secretly a methodist, I sought to do the right things: the right positions, the right times, the right regulation of breathing, the right topics, the right contemplations. Over the years I have discovered that it is more important to let the Lord teach me how to pray. I have also discovered that praying regularly matters much more than following any particular method or technique of prayer.

Liturgical prayer has consistently helped and supported me. The Eucharistic liturgy and, more and more, the Liturgy of the Hours provide both a framework of prayer for me and an ecclesial context such that all my prayer takes on a much more public dimension than I would have imagined years ago. These public prayers of the Church, together with the usual variety of pastoral work, have led me to intercessory prayer as a regular part of each day. This type of prayer reinforces the lesson that God teaches prayer; I don't own my personal prayer, but share in a much broader hymn of praise and petition.

The Ignatian foundation of my prayer leads to another quality: whatever form the prayer takes—liturgical, intercessory, more contemplative—it has proved important to me to ask for the grace I want. In general I tend to seek a deeper knowledge of and love for the Lord or a sense of God's will. Like everyone else, I suppose, I have asked for peace or for joy or for strength in more specific

moments.

My prayer and my resolve to pray have benefited greatly from my seeing other Jesuits pray. This is nothing fancy: I have seen others celebrate the Eucharist, sit quietly in the chapel, read the Scriptures, ask prayers for others. This praying by others is an invitation and an example for which I am deeply grateful. On those days on which I still wish I could find a method, I am often fortunate enough to find a companion in our Society who will show me his prayer.

Despite the fact that a part of me wants to believe that prayer is something extraordinary, my experience tells me that prayer is the ordinary rhythm of our lives. That's consoling because it means that I can do it.

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## The Prayer of Incompetence

*William C. Spohn, S.J.*

When I pray it is not an experience of competence. For a long time this bothered me; now it seems to have a gracious dimension. Coming to terms with this fact may be early middle age's adjustment to the inevitable. Or it may indicate something fairly common about Jesuit prayer. In the midst of lives of energy and effectiveness, many of us may experience prayer as a sector of incompetence where we have no idea of what the "right moves" are or wonder if there are any right moves at all. During tertianship our director told me that we never know whether we are doing the right thing in prayer, any more than we can be certain that we are doing or saying the right thing in a relationship. We try to be attentive, responsive, and do

what we can. This advice came as a great relief to one not immune to the performance syndrome, whose metaphors of experience spontaneously come from the realms of politics and sports. What if life isn't a contest? What if there are no scorecards on contemplation?

Most of the time prayer is not the stuff that essays are made of. I pray soon after waking up in the morning, before the static begins to cloud my focus. The *Prayer of Christians* or the readings of the daily Eucharist usually provide something to begin with. I read until something resonates, or at least slows me down. In recent years an attitude or an "affection" fills this role more than a narrative or a set of ideas. The psalter often provides language and images that articulate something going on within me. They voice a posture of longing or disappointment or confidence and guide it towards God. Once they resonate with some mood or issue which I have been packing around, they enable it to come into the light before the Lord. If I can locate that affection, the time of prayer will have a focus which I can drop back into underneath the inevitable meanderings of the mind. Words help to refocus, but they don't seem to advance or deepen the being present to God.

Many times I cannot find anything that resonates, and then I spin the dial like a bored listener fiddling with the radio. If I can catch myself, I try to surrender to God this effort to make prayer "work." And then it sometimes settles down into a quiet being there in what I hope is God's presence. Stuff from the day, from work, from relationships especially, floats by, and prayer becomes a form of examen where the quality of these movements is savored or where they are handed over to God. Most of the time I hope that the Spirit is praying in me underneath my fidgeting, while believing that my task is primarily to show up and stay there.

On this past retreat it occurred to me that the preference for moments of deep quiet may be one more performance trap. Who is to say that God may not touch us as deeply in flat times as in those which seem profound to us? "Who has known the mind of God and who has ever given Him advice?" At any rate, the daily time of meditation may be a particularly Ignatian experience of poverty and

dependence on God precisely in this experience of incompetence. It could be that we are blessed by the humiliation that a chronicle of our contemplative experience would cure insomnia. On the other hand, the daily reminder that our ways are not the final measure may open us to the relish of "devotion" which comes in preaching, teaching, and the rest of public ministry.

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## Learning to Pray

*John Staudenmaier, S.J.*

In 1980 sixteen Jesuits gathered for tertianship. Our director asked us to tell one another how we prayed. He said: "Tertianship doesn't teach us how to pray; we would not be in the Society at this point if we weren't praying. Tertianship teaches us to recognize how we already pray." Each of us began with some variant of the disclaimer "I don't think I pray enough," and proceeded to describe a prayer life both honest and beautiful. We found it easier, I think, to recognize the prayer embedded in everyone else's life than in our own. That experience has often helped me in the years since. No matter how unaware of praying I may be and no matter how much I may doubt the integrity of my prayer, I am already praying. Tertianship helped me to trust the depth of the longing for God in my ordinary life and to depend less on extraordinary moments of prayer as "proof" that I really pray.

Tertianship also taught me a simple pragmatic lesson along the lines of Ignatius's advice that we notice what helps us and then use those helps. At the ripe age of forty, I discovered a little ritual on

rising. I get out of bed, dress, and go immediately to make a large mug of tea on my way to a place in our chapel that I like. There I sit and drink my tea in the presence of God. I try not to talk with anyone en route, so that I remain as much asleep as possible while I sit there. That semiconscious state gives me access to my fears, angers, joys, griefs, hopes. Tertianship taught me that I live my normal waking life so intensely that it is not easy for me to have access to my affective condition. Praying while half asleep offers me a place where God and I meet at the heart of my life. I find that I manage early-morning prayer four or five days a week because I need that partly wakeful time with God. Missing a few days in a row has come to feel like missing food.

In the last year I've learned a third lesson. I begin to understand that it is important for me to pay attention to my grief more than I used to, that my courage and my personal energy are not enough to live on by themselves. When I follow the beatitude "Blessed are they who grieve" and admit that I am sad, God (and the people God has sent into my life) can comfort me and show me the joy, the courage, and the beauty of my life. I have learned, to put it another way, that I cannot pray as if I were on my own, an autonomous pilgrim; that we are all in this together, God and all of us who share the journey. I like that a lot.

## The Spirit, Guide of Prayer

*Joseph Tetlow, S.J.*

Is it useful to tell about our prayer? Sometimes it makes me uneasy. Our gifts, however, are not for ourselves; instead of dramatizing them, perhaps we could just help one another say thanks.

For about ten years of my life, I did not pray. I do not mean that I did not pray formally; I mean that I did not pray at all, except when I went out into a wilderness (real) or led people in the Eucharist.

During those years God just waited for me. I have come to understand that God is tremendously courteous, never forcing Himself on anyone.

During those years, also, I was tremendously encouraged by friends' prayer, some of it shared in Eucharist and some of it in the charismatic renewal. Friends in the Lord are a greater blessing to me than my excellent health or the freedom of my country. I was not a friend of Jesus Christ until I had grown in friendship with others of His friends, which I honestly believe has something to do with His new commandment.

During those years, finally, I lived what ought to be called a casually sinful life. I mean that I was casual about sin. Most of my sins were like anyone's, drab and quite ugly. I do not know how God put up with them, though I do know why. I still commit sins, but the Spirit of God has led me to love a great deal more, so that I do not sin happily as I once did but instead am honestly grieved by my own sins.

The Spirit of Life has led me to pray, some days a lot, every day at least some. The Spirit also guides how I pray, prompting changes from year to year, from period to period. Very early most mornings, I sit still in a big chair in the chapel. Right now, I generally allow to repeat itself in my mind the word that was there when I woke up, something like "Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ." Or, if I have been

unfaithful, "To my Lord I give the days of my life and the use of my death." I ask a lot for what I want to happen in me or through me, and for what I need.

Then I usually have things to think about—projects, spiritual friends, someone who gives me feelings I need to tame, or aggravations, like a bill to pay. As I remember, try interpretations, test my valuings against Scripture, and plan, my real feelings and affects emerge; and Jesus Christ stands there with me watching them. Jesus stands not only as God-given friend (where our mature relationship started), but also as the Lord of all in me and in my life world.

In this prayer in recent years, I have discovered to my astonishment what a good friend Joseph of Nazareth can be (he helps a lot with celibacy), and Simon Peter (he helps a lot when I really fail my Lord), and also some Jesuits who have died. A good amount of my prayer goes into asking help.

Most mornings I change my mind about something or someone, reject a feeling I have had, or adopt some valuation I had been resisting. I often find out something I can do for the love I owe another. That's so common that I wonder whether I did any loving things at all while I was not praying.

When I think about prayer, I sometimes have the sense that I do not do this work alone or even in partnership. I feel that it is like skiing confidently and gracefully down a slope. Somehow, prayer comes in me from the way things are in God. Perhaps I shouldn't say this, but I also feel that the prayer that God gives me is a very ordinary gift. I do not mean that this gift is not splendid or that I do not cherish it more than any other gift. I mean that this prayer belongs to every day, every one, and every place, if only we would find in ourselves the deepest desires that God raises in us.

We have to listen to such an abundance of noises. In the ruckus I found God doing in me what I barely had the sense to know needed doing. I then began to attend to God in Christ and found God always doing, giving God's Self. Finally I came to recognize the Holy Spirit, who came to me like a supremely intelligent, very together and beautiful woman, and still does. She makes me want to be who I am

and makes me really like who I am, and at the same time makes me want to go way beyond myself. She makes me want to find out those around me who are in need, and to fill that need as best I can. The Spirit has taught me loving.

At night I sit in my room for a long time and let the day go into God. I name those of my actions or omissions that forced God's hand, but mostly give thanks. This is the time when Richard Rolle's statement says it all: "From my study of Scripture I have learned that to love Christ Jesus above all else will require three things: warmth and song and sweetness. But these will not long endure without great quiet." That quiet starts in prayer and spreads out to friendships and to busyness. In that quiet God's love works constantly, and does all the work.

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## That Needful, Never-Spent Element

*David Toolan, S.J.*

Like so many other Jesuits, I am a talented fellow—higher-than-average IQ, no genius but broadly knowledgeable, sociable, articulate, poised in front of a microphone and an audience, imaginative when squeezed; and I write a decent sentence. It follows, then —though this is a non sequitur—that I can glide a good distance on what genes, Irish-American family gall, and the Society's overeducation have given me. Without prayer, that is to say, the charming show, the seeming class act, goes on. Trouble is, I get out of breath, a certain kind of breath.

Well, I'm grateful for the times when the class act hasn't been enough—when I've either run out of gas or run up against powers

(like the nightmare spirits that haunt my paraplegic friend, H. P.) that lie beyond my smarts. This took a while to sink in. The novitiate long retreat almost finished me off as a pray-er: little joy, only elephant knees to show for all that muscular, Pelagian trying. Even though I read Jean-Pierre de Caussade, I wasn't Taoist enough, nor did I know how to pray by releasing imagination or that the primary text was my own body's sympathetic nervous system. Locked up in a sylvan total institution, the question "What more can I do for Christ?" was just torture. (In 1977, when I made the Exercises again, I took along Julian of Norwich's *Showings* for the protection afforded, as I see now, by Christ asking her, "What more can I do for you?") For years, then, the closest I ever got to comprehending the *ad amorem* came through meditating the touch, taste, and smell of a Sunkist orange.

Since those early false starts, I've had some rather bizarre prayer guides: a Jewish analytic psychologist who awakened me to the imaginative currents of my own soul, a Chinese t'ai chi teacher who helped me recover the sense of the body as temple, a hip California therapist who reintroduced me to my guardian angel, an Israeli physiotherapist who pointed out what a difference full breathing makes, and a number of Buddhist masters who know more than a thing or two about "loving kindness" meditations and the power of forgiveness. And I cannot forget several unordained women who have shown me what imaginative ritual enactment can do to make a sacred parable pound musically in your heart. If you had your wits about you and were willing to learn, America in the seventies was alive with teachers—people I think of as collaborators in what the Exercises are about—and I am thankful.

For me, prayer is a deep breath, a way of paying attention, tuning in, to the groans of Mother Earth and, yes, to the sound of those "ah! bright wings" that beat over and within this "bent world." I'm irregular, no better at it than at proper diet or physical exercise (both of which are related). I usually find myself driven to it when the pain or soul-hunger gets too bad, when nothing will do except this kind of respiration. The signal? When spontaneously I start

reciting the Memorare—for some "needful, never spent / And nursing element."

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## "Heard Melodies Are Sweet, but Those Unheard Are Sweeter"

*John Topel, S.J.*

A question like "What is your best style of prayer?" always handcuffs me. If prayer is no escape from the necessity of the cross in Christian life, then difficult prayer may be my best prayer.

In the novitiate my pain in prayer was always the distractions of a hyperactive imagination. Now my pain in prayer involves resolutely facing the split between my real thirst for God as the only Reality which can satisfy the deepest longings of my person, and my self-defeating desires to find satisfactions in the pleasures and honors of my professional and personal life as an American Jesuit in university work.

Since those desires remain so shamefully strong in me, I know that God can lead me to himself only by hiding from me, causing me to seek him in the purity of a will which finds very little satisfaction (pleasures, honors) in prayer. Consequently, my prayer is a wandering in the desert, and one which may well take forty years. Facing that arid trudging every morning of my life is a pain which I want to avoid, especially when I know that the promised land is not within my power to enter or conquer. (Indeed, its "margins fade forever when I move"!) And so entering the desert daily and examining my discouragingly circuitous route at the end of each day may be my best prayer. But its chaos makes it difficult to describe to even the

most perceptive reader.

The Lord takes pity on my discouragement and allows me a glimpse of the promised land now and then, a swallow of water to keep me going in the desert. Sometimes that experience is a bolt out of the blue, entirely independent of any time or structure of prayer. When it happens in prayer, it occurs ordinarily in my favorite format for prayer: I must pray in the morning, before my imagination and mind have gotten up a head of steam. I begin with some psalms out of the breviary in order to put myself in an attitude of praise and reverence for the presence of God in my life. If something from a psalm strikes deep in my soul, I remain with it. Otherwise, I fix my gaze on the large crucifix in my room and let my will, underneath all the distractions, intend that sweet mystery. Mute contemplation of the crucifix makes bearable, "locates," the sufferings of my life, so trivial in comparison with the pains of our world which God himself willingly embraced for me. My pains, most especially those arising from my aberrant thirst for pleasures and honors, are swallowed up and ordered in the love of "the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

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## Prayer of a Companion of Jesus

*John H. Wright, S.J.*

Some thirty-five years ago my tertian instructor told us that it is more important to have a clear understanding of the reasons for praying than to have an ironclad resolution to pray. Ironclad resolutions tend to get rusty and to wear out. But a clear understanding of reasons can renew a life of prayer that is lagging. These reasons are

more a matter of personal experience than of abstract reasoning. To recall them can lead us to turn again to the source of our life and find there the renewal that makes us whole.

It has become increasingly clear to me that the one thing that makes sense of the Jesuit life and makes it possible to live that life in a meaningful and authentic way is prayer. For me the most illuminating and attractive description of what it means to be a Jesuit is found in the directive that Ignatius gave his early followers: If anyone asks who you are, tell them that you are companions of Jesus. The companionship Ignatius had in mind is not an exercise of the historical imagination, nor a reverie of wishful thinking, but the experience of an actual relationship recognized by faith and entered into by love. For Jesus Christ is actually present in the world; He truly invites us to be with Him and share His life and work; and He promises never to leave us alone. This is the vision of the Call of the King in the Spiritual Exercises, the vision every Jesuit embraces and tries to live.

But, to hear the invitation of Jesus, to respond to Him with generous love, and to trust in His promise belong to the very essence of prayer springing from a believing heart. For we are not dealing with the abstract truth of a proposition, nor calculating the consequences of certain ways of acting; but we are entering into personal communion with One who calls and promises. We are listening to Him and answering Him in the language of trust and friendship.

A Jesuit might slip into a way of acting in which he lives in a Jesuit house, does works that belong to a Jesuit ministry, follows the external regime of a Jesuit way of life, but does all of this apart from a life of prayer as a Companion of Jesus. This way of life is radically absurd. It is like going through the motions of eating with no food on your plate, or reading a page on which nothing is written, or holding a conversation with a doorpost.

A Jesuit of this sort would illustrate the "cut-flower effect." Flowers which were at one time rooted in the soil and drew nourishment from it to grow and develop are now cut off from those roots. They continue to bloom for a while, but in a short time they wither without leaving fruit or seed.

Likewise, a Jesuit living without the prayer of a Companion of Jesus may give an outward appearance of healthy vitality. But the deeds and words, the events and personal relations that make up his life gradually appear to him senseless, and at that point the Jesuit life becomes impossible.

However, a Jesuit who regularly and honestly renews his personal contact with the Lord in prayer discovers the light and the love that makes the Jesuit way of life supremely worthwhile. It is not a matter of anticipating a suitable reward, but of experiencing the joy and the peace of Christ, even in suffering and difficulty.

This year, to my astonishment, I find that I am a golden jubilarian. I am especially grateful for two things: to have lived fifty years as a Companion of Jesus in spite of many shortcomings, and to have lived those years as a companion of Companions of Jesus. It is only prayer in response to the gracious love of God that has made this possible and brought it about.

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